P-Agnew, Bruce
Phillips, Dave
Night Watch

ooks

wenty-five years n the spy business

peaking out in favor of the Central ntelligence Agency these days is disnctly unfashionable. For about four ears, the CIA has been buffeted by xposés of excesses, illegalities, and nterventions—foreign and domestic—ome too preposterous to be true, others qually preposterous that have been roven and acknowledged. The agency is nder fire, a prime candidate for ramatic reorganization.

These days a kind of siege entality has developed within he CIA's modernistic and spacious headquarters at Langley, a. Some intelligence officers re convinced that no story nfavorable to the CIA is too nbelievable to find its way nto print—and that no story avorable to the agency is of nterest to the nation's writers nd editors. A case in point: In he recent controversy over ompetitive evaluations of Soviet military capabilities and ntentions, the CIA was again ast as the villain, this time for eing too dovish. Perhaps in its losed society at Langley, the gency can be forgiven for iguring that it just can't win.

David Atlee Phillips is a spy who came out from Langley nto the cold to write, to lecture, nd to debate critics in defense f the CIA and his colleagues here. He is a subtle, fascinatng, and wryly entertaining dvocate. Different readers will isagree over whether he is a ersuasive one, but he is certainly worth hearing out.

The Night Watch is a memoir of a professional intelligence career that started in 1950, when, as the publisher of an English-language weekly in Santiago, Chile, Phillips was recruited as a parttime CIA agent. His career ended several revolutions and a few qualms of conscience later in 1975, when he resigned as chief of the CIA's Western Hemisphere division. Along the way, Phillips had a hand in some of the CIA's best-known successes and failures:

- The 1954 overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. Phillips, a propagandist, was one of the team that created The Voice of Liberation, the clandestine radio station that pretended to operate from within Guatemala to pave the way for an invasion by exiles. So successful was the charade that when The Voice of Liberation proclaimed an invasion which had not yet begun, complete with specious military communications between nonexistent units, even Arbenz was taken in by the hoax. He resigned and sought asylum in the Mexican embassy. By his own account, Phillips had worried about the ethics of helping overthrow a democratically elected government, but when it was over, he and his superior officers, including CIA Director Allen Dulles, were called to the White House to brief President Eisenhower, and Ike had this conclusion: "Thanks Allen, and thanks to all of you. You've averted a Soviet beachhead in this hemisphere."
- The Bay of Pigs. Phillips ran the propaganda campaign, including another clandestine radio. He attributes the failure to a series of mistakes: changing the original site of the invasion; transforming its nature from a guerrilla operation to a full-scale military invasion, complete with amphibious tank landings; canceling the D-Day air strike; and truncating air support over the beaches. Phillips does not try to exonerate the CIA. "At some point, we should have cried 'enough,'" he writes. "When told the plan was to be changed from a classic guerrilla landing at Trinidad to a military operation, we should have protested individually to the point of not going along." But he concludes with the philosophical observation of a close CIA friend: After the toppling of Mossadegh in Iran and Arbenz in Guatemala, "all those successes just had to lead to a failure eventually because the system kept calling on us for more and more, even when it should have been obvious that secret shenanigans couldn't do what armies are supposed to do."
- The Dominican Republic. By Phillips' account, the CIA role was benign, if dangerous: infiltrating and providing intelligence on the rebel forces, persuading factional leaders to leave the country so that a provisional government could be formed and an election held, and uncovering Communist plans—backed by Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam—for continued subversion and guerrilla warfare. This last intelligence coup, he asserts, "was a major factor in maintaining political stability, which has now lasted more than a decade."
- Chile. The CIA accepted the order to try to prevent Salvador Allende from becoming President—even though Allende had won a thin plurality in the 1970 election. Phillips and others

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ard Helms, as saying, "There's something I've had to learn to understand. I've had to learn to understand Presidents." Plans for a CIA-sponsored military coup were aborted by the death, in a kidnap attempt, of Allende's military chief, General René Schneider. The killers were not in contact with the CIA, and Phillips writes: "Thank God, I said to myself, for at least that small favor." The CIA was not, he insists, behind the coup that finally toppled Allende.

This is heavy, heady stuff. But Phillips leavens it liberally with humor, and he tells a story well. For example, in discussing détente, he writes: "General Vernon Walters often told the story of the two Americans who visited the Moscow zoo. They were amazed to find a large bear and a small lamb in the same cage. They summoned the zookeeper.

"'This is amazing,' the Americans said. 'We have never seen a bear and a lamb in the same cage.'

"'Oh, yes,' the zookeeper replied. 'This is to prove that coexistence is possible. This demonstrates that détente can work.'

"'Well, it is incredible,' the visitors said.

"The zookeeper looked about, to be sure he was not being overheard. Then he added, 'Of course, we have to change the lamb every day.'"

And Phillips observes: "In the final analysis, someone has to look after the lambs of the world."

Phillips does not try to defend every CIA misstep. Assassination plots, he says, are "unacceptable." Unconstitutional CIA operations in the U.S. are "indefensible." He considered resigning over the aborted plan to stage a coup against Allende. But his overall conclusion is unsurprising: "Clandestine operations have been condemned as immoral in principle and illegal in practice. This attitude naively sidesteps the problems of existing and, indeed, surviving in a world whose history continues to be determined by nations promoting their own interests at the expense of others. . . . More to the point, it would have the United States, blindfolded and with one hand tied behind its back, compete in the international arena under rules of engagement which, at best, are minimal and flexible."

—Bruce Agnew

Chief congressional correspondent Bruce Agnew occasionally gets out to the CIA headquarters in Langley. ■